



THE SOURCE



NEWSLETTER OF THE NHDES DRINKING WATER SOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAM
ON THE WEB AT WWW.DES.STATE.NH.US/DWSPP

SUMMER 2001

Breaking Barriers

Examining Obstacles to Conservation and Cooperation

The draft report notes that...water suppliers should take an aggressive approach to source protection and new source development.

DES and the NH Public Utilities Commission (PUC) are examining possible regulatory obstacles to water conservation and regional cooperation among water suppliers. Mandated by Senate Bill 331 (SB 331), which was enacted in the 2000 legislative session, the two agencies were finalizing the report on this issue as we went to press. In addition to identifying ways in which environmental (DES) and economic (PUC) regulations may impede regional cooperation and conservation, the report will identify ways of addressing these barriers. Prompted in part by substantial population growth in many parts of the state, legislated limits on water withdrawals, and the dry summer of 1999, the two agencies' work has involved a survey of water suppliers and regional planning and economic development entities, and a series of working sessions with a broad-based group of stakeholders.

The draft report notes that in many areas of the state, to keep pace with projected growth in demand due to economic development and other factors, water suppliers should take an aggressive approach to source protection and new source development, and participate in regional planning studies. This type of water planning includes safe yield studies, delineating and protecting wellhead protection areas and critical watershed areas, and assessments of the impact of withdrawals on other water resources and users. However, PUC-regulated water suppliers have been uncertain about whether they can recover the costs of such studies from rate-payers. One possible way of dealing with this problem would be to develop a DES/PUC pre-approval process for the inclusion of planning costs in the rate base.

Another potential regulatory barrier to regional cooperation may be posed by existing and future limits on water withdrawals. Such limits may create uncertainty regarding the future yield of current supplies or those that may be developed to meet projected demand. Current DES rules for large groundwater withdrawals support a first-come, first-served concept of water use (while requiring the applicant to demonstrate that the proposed withdrawal will not adversely affect an existing water user or natural resource). Ways to encourage all water users to work together might include establishing a hierarchy for the priority of water uses, or to require proponents of new withdrawals to obtain water from the "least impacting alternative."

The draft report also took note of barriers to water conservation. For example, factors that discourage utilities from adopting conservation

Grant Applications for Protection Projects Available Soon



It's almost that time of year again! At the end of the summer, applications for the Local Source Water Protection Grants will be mailed out. Over \$300,000 in grant funds will be available to develop and implement programs to protect existing sources of public drinking water and identify and address nonpoint source pollution in order to protect watersheds. The applications are mailed to organizations such as public water systems, municipalities, watershed associations, consultants, and regional planning commissions. The applications will be due in mid-November. Applications can also be found on our website at www.des.state.nh.us/dwspp. If you would like to be on the mailing list or if you have any questions, please contact Johnna McKenna at 603-271-7017 or jmckenna@des.state.nh.us

Conservation continued page 4



Spotlight on... Somersworth: Signs of Cooperation

For the past year, Somersworth Water Works and the Berwick (Maine) Water Department have been quietly working together to assess and protect their shared source, the Salmon Falls River. The Somersworth system serves approximately 9,500 people and the Berwick system about 1,900. Their intakes are located within 500 yards of each other. Berwick relies solely on the Salmon Falls River, while Somersworth also has a high-yield gravel-pack well.

"We have long recognized that we share the source," notes Berwick chief operator Chris Weismann, "but the huge size of the watershed has been imposing as far as figuring out how to protect the river." One of the first steps, according to Somersworth water superintendent Ronald Gagnon, was to conduct a survey along the banks of the Salmon Falls and one of its tributaries, the Little River in Maine. The Little River was chosen because it contributes significantly to color levels at the water supply intakes, especially during high runoff periods. The survey looked for industrial uses, outfall pipes, and other potential contamination sources along a 14-mile stretch of the river from the Milton dam to the intake in Somersworth.

Gagnon followed up the survey with a mailing to landowners along the Salmon Falls River, mak-

ing them aware of the river's importance as a water supply source and reminding them to avoid contaminating the river. Gagnon and Weismann are planning to follow up the earlier survey with a closer inspection of the

river by canoe this year, since roads do not run close to the river in many places. This time, they will be looking for outfall pipes, unexpected developed areas, agricultural areas, and anything that looks like a potential threat.

The two systems are already moving ahead with a plan to place 20 signs at bridges, parks, and public access points along the Salmon Falls River in Somersworth, Berwick, and participating upstream communities. The signs will let people know about the river's importance as a water supply source, point out that the river is protected by the laws of both states, and urge people to call 911 in the event of a spill.

PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

FOR SOMERSWORTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
AND BERWICK, MAINE

PLEASE PROTECT IT

KEEP ALL REFUSE, POLLUTION,
AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
OUT OF THE SALMON FALLS RIVER,
AND OFF OF ITS BANKS

VIOLATORS FACE CRIMINAL AND
CIVIL PENALTIES
38 M.R.S.A. § 417, N.H.R.S.A. § 485:17, 19.

FOR ACCIDENTAL SPILLS
CALL: 911

Interns Coming to a SWPA Near You

This summer, two interns will be conducting windshield surveys and locating potential contamination sources with global positioning satellite (GPS) receivers for the Drinking Water Source Assessment Program's (DWSAP) three-year project of assessing the vulnerability of the state's 3,000+ public water supply sources. The purpose of the DWSAP is to provide useful information to local water suppliers to help them maintain and protect their local sources of drinking water. No photographs or samples of any kind will be taken. The visit is not an inspection regarding any compliance or enforcement issues, and it is not necessary for someone to be present for this particular site visit. At the end of the project, public water system owners and towns will receive a copy of the report. DES expects to complete the field work for 15 surface water sources, 285 transient systems (e.g. daycares, campgrounds, workplaces) and 50 community systems. If you have any questions about these visits or the reports, please contact Johnna McKenna at 603-271-7017. Completed assessments can be viewed on our web site at www.des.state.nh.us/dwssp/dwsap.

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Closer To Home

Information for well owners and
public water system customers

Abandoned Wells...Conduits for Contamination

Do you know of abandoned wells on your property that are no longer being used? This could include drinking water wells or monitoring wells that may have been installed as part of an environmental assessment of a property. Besides posing a threat to people or animals that could get trapped in dug wells, abandoned wells of any kind can also pose a threat to groundwater by acting as a conduit through which surface water contamination can reach an aquifer. ***Improperly abandoned wells provide direct access to aquifers and can carry contaminants straight to the drinking water supply.*** In addition, improperly abandoned wells can create a liability problem at the time of property resale or if the well causes contamination of neighboring wells.

If you have an unused well on your property, it is important that you evaluate its usefulness and safety and determine if it needs to be sealed. Wells are expensive commodities and are generally an asset to the property even if they are not currently in use, as long as they are properly maintained.

If it is decided that a well has no present or potential useful purpose or has no real value and may constitute

a liability, then the well is, for all practical purposes, abandoned and must be properly decommissioned.

In New Hampshire, abandoned wells are required to be sealed in an appropriate manner to prevent the entry of contaminants into the groundwater. The responsibility for sealing or decommissioning an abandoned well lies with the well owner.

The Department of Environmental Services requires that the decommissioning of water wells be performed by a licensed New Hampshire Water Well Contractor. Licensed contractors have the necessary equipment and experience to complete the job safely and properly. To obtain a list of licensed contractors, contact Chip Mackey at 271-2410. The licensed contractor will determine the proper sealing method, which will depend on whether the well being decommissioned is a drilled bedrock well, a drilled or driven gravel well, or a shallow dug well.

Additional information about well decommissioning is available by contacting the N.H. Water Well Board at 271-1974 or by viewing our fact sheet at www.des.state.nh.us/factsheets/ws/ws-1-7.htm.



Free Protection Resources Available

Source Water Awareness Media Kit On-line

To assist small, rural communities in developing a media campaign strategy to increase the awareness of drinking water source protection, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has created the Source Water Awareness Media Toolkit. The toolkit, which is available on-line at www.lgean.org/html/_tooldetail.cfm?id=43, includes templates, logos, brochures, sample public service announcements (PSAs), and other sample promotional materials that can be used to help raise community awareness. ICMA is a professional and educational organization representing appointed managers and administrators in local governments.

CD Offers Help with Emergency Planning

Is your system prepared for a flood, fire, ice storm, chemical spill, or even sabotage? With a grant from USEPA, the Illinois Section of the American Water Works Association and Midwest Technology Assistance Center have developed a free, interactive guide to emergency planning. After you enter the necessary data in response to the program's questions, the program creates a downloadable emergency response manual unique to your system. To obtain a free copy of the guide on CD, call (815) 496-3062 or email Laurie Papanos at laurie@isawwa.org. To see a sample of the program on line, visit www.isawwa.org/cd.htm.

DES Adopts Large Groundwater Withdrawal Rules

On May 7, 2001, DES adopted Minor and Major Large Groundwater Withdrawal Rules (Env-Ws 387 and 388). These rules became effective on May 12, 2001. The rules implement revisions to RSA 485:3 and RSA 485-C made by Ch. 124 Laws of 1998. The rules are applicable to all new groundwater withdrawals that exceed 57,600 gallons over any 24-hour period. The statute and rules require that an applicant for a new Large Groundwater Withdrawal develop a conservation management plan that demonstrates need for the proposed withdrawal; assess the impacts associated with the proposed withdrawal to environmental resources and existing water users; and notify the public about the new large withdrawal.

For more information about the new Large Groundwater Withdrawal Rules, or to obtain a copy of the regulations, visit DES' website at www.des.state.nh.us/dwspp/lgwith.htm.

Work Progresses on NH Groundwater and Drinking Water Protection Strategy

DES staff and stakeholders have been busy over the last year and a half completing tasks set out in the NH Groundwater and Drinking Water Strategy, a five-year plan outlining priority tasks for the protection of drinking water resources. The following highlights the completed tasks to date:

- ◆ Creation and implementation of the Water Supply Land Conservation Grant Program to help municipalities permanently protect critical water supply lands.
- ◆ Creation and implementation of a private well initiative to encourage increased sampling of private wells.
- ◆ Development and review of a document to engage local officials in the issue of the loss of stormwater recharge in developing areas.
- ◆ Development of a mini grant program to assist small agricultural operations with addressing potential contamination sources.
- ◆ Creation of a low-interest loan program for replacement of failed septic systems

Further information on the status of the strategy can be found on our website at www.des.state.nh.us/strategy.htm

Conservation continued from pg. 1

measures include uncertainty over recoverability of public education costs, negative public perception of conservation rates, and the lost revenue associated with the time it takes to adjust rate structures as conservation measures kick in. While most of these issues can be addressed by the water utility without any changes in state programs, the report noted that state agencies could provide education and outreach to improve public acceptance of conservation rate structures, create incentives for PUC-regulated water suppliers to adopt conservation measures, and identify specific water conservation measures that would be eligible for rate reimbursement.

A copy of the final report will be available in July by contacting Brandon Kernan at 271-0660 or bkernan@des.state.nh.us, or by visiting www.des.state.nh.us/sb331

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